



Friday @ the Center: April 20, 2007

Writing for Everyone: Part 8

GLOBAL TIP: In the shaping stage, pay attention to the shape of paragraphs. Contrary to popular opinion, not every single paragraph in an academic essay needs to be a topic-sentence paragraph (think about introductions, conclusions, transition paragraphs, summary paragraphs, dialogue, or one-sentence “effect” paragraphs, etc.). But topic sentences paragraphs go a long way if you are presenting points and marshalling evidence with the goal of establishing and proving a thesis, or claim. Some helpful comments you can make on papers with respect to paragraphs are: “this paragraph extends over two pages, how could you break it up?” “What’s with the five two-sentence paragraphs; it’s very jerky?”; “I can’t figure out what the point of this paragraph is”; “This paragraph really has two very different points in it. Why don’t you divide it?” or “Great topic sentence here and use of detailed evidence!”

FINISHING TIP: The eighth most frequent punctuation error in college writing, according to Lunsford’s research, is **the dreaded COMMA SPLICE**. I’ve always liked the nautical flavor of that label, perhaps because I wrote my dissertation on *Moby-Dick*. ANYWAY, a comma splice occurs when a comma is used to splice together two clauses that could be sentences on their own: i.e., “Ethel pounced ferociously on the first spring robin, Lucy decided to spread her considerable girth out on the sunny patio.” There are several ways to correct comma splices; the most common are 1) replacing the comma splice with a period and thus creating two sentences; 2) replacing the comma splice with a semicolon, or 3) adding a coordinating conjunction (“Ethel pounced ferociously on the first spring robin, but Lucy decided to spread her considerable girth out on the sunny patio”).

Laptops in the Classroom

It’s a dilemma, isn’t it—dealing with laptops in the classroom? I can’t tell you how many SPU classes I’ve observed where students were using their laptops (or lab computers) for such edifying activities as shoe shopping, instant messaging, checking sports scores, or playing video games. A recent study at Winona State University confirms that such activities detract from learning. The study examined the behavior of students in two large psychology classes held in lecture halls with wireless access. Eighty-one percent of the students who brought laptops with them reported that they checked their email during class; 68 percent kept instant messaging open; and 25 percent admitted to playing games during the class. Students who regularly brought laptops to class ended up with a grade-point average 5 percent lower than non-laptop using students. Solutions? Ban laptops from class? Practice constant vigilance, walking around the class to glance at the screens? Let them suffer the consequences of their actions?

Two Grant Opportunities

- \$10,000 CASE RESEARCH GRANT. The North American Case Research Association (NACRA) will make at least two grants to support case research during the 2007-2008

academic year. Grant proposals may target one or a combination of two funding categories: (1) Using Cases to Build Theory; (2) Teaching Case Development. Submission guidelines are available at <http://www.nacra.net/nacra/>. Submission Deadline: **June 1, 2007**.

- **\$6,000-\$10,000 EMERGING SCHOLARS NETWORK GRANT.** The Christian Scholars Foundation is a small family foundation that makes annual grants available for the purpose of cultivating and assisting Christian academics. They especially wish to assist junior faculty members (less than ten years of experience) who show promise both in their academic fields and as Christian leaders. The intent of this assistance is to augment the grantees' academic credibility so that their views and opinions as Christians may be heard with respect in academe. The primary emphases in selection of grantees include academic achievement and promise, concrete evidence of Christian commitment and evidence of an interest in teaching. Research topics should be of interest beyond the Christian community. Submission deadline: **June 30, 2007**. For more information, [click here](#).

Don't forget to go to the faculty meeting with the self-study visit team on Monday afternoon, unless you have a class!

Cheers,

Susan

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